

The Presidential Campaign: Side Show or Main Event?

By Mike Winther, *President of the Institute for Principle Studies*

In each four-year presidential cycle, much of America becomes completely enamored with the drama of the presidential election. We follow the media as they follow the presidential candidates—we become the paparazzi following the paparazzi. For many Americans, the presidential race is a hybridization of entertainment, drama, sport, and ultimately distraction. Although the presidential election is certainly important, I believe that our current perspective on the President and the presidential election is harmful to our efforts to produce positive change in America.

While we are enticed into being presidential paparazzi, our attention is being diverted away from dozens of more important issues. Here are five things that we need to consider:

1. Election outcomes are a measurement of how well we are discipling the nations.

If our elections don't turn out the way we want, it is because we have not captured the hearts and minds of our countrymen. We want to elect a "good" president without producing a "good" population. We want a president who supports the Constitution without a citizenry that supports the Constitution.

We want the fruit without first plowing, planting, weeding and watering.

2. The Presidential campaign can distract us from other, more immediate, issues.

As I write this, we have important and urgent issues that need attention. Abortion, forced immunizations, the Trans Pacific Partnership, Obama-care, and unconstitutional government surveillance of our citizens are just a few of the urgent issues that should be receiving our attention. Some of these issues come with immediate opportunities that will be missed without immediate action. And yet some of those who should be soldiers in these battles are hypnotically engrossed in daily doses of Presidential campaign theater that takes place on their radios, TV's, and news magazines.

It is always easier to be a spectator than it is to be a participant. Yet, Christians must be players and activists not just spectators with a remote control in our hands.

3. The presidency is the least important federal office.

This is true both constitutionally and practically.

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Constitutionalists and advocates of limited government understand that modern presidents are exercising illegitimate and unconstitutional powers. Unfortunately, we contribute to this error when we place too much importance on the office and the person who holds it. The real way to counter the imperial presidency is to elect congressmen who will hold the Chief Executive accountable. Unfortunately, we place all of our attention on the race for the White House and ignore the races for the House and Senate.

4. Actions speak louder than words.

Have you ever heard someone say, *“If candidate X would just say Y, then I could support him.”*

We spend too much time listening to the words of the candidates and precious little time looking at their actions. Remember that the “words” of the campaign are carefully chosen as part of a strategy. These campaign “positions” almost always evolve during the course of a campaign. Republicans move “right” in the primary and “left” in the general election. Not surprisingly, Democrats tend to do the opposite. And who can deny that a candidate’s campaign statements have often been poor predictors of their actual policies.

Instead of saying, *“if he would just take a stronger stand on this or that issue, I would support him”*, we should say, *“if only he had taken the right action 3 years ago, I would have supported him.”*

Unfortunately, our media don’t want to talk much about how any candidate voted when they were governors, senators or congressmen. To do so would make the next 12 months of pre-election coverage unnecessary. That’s not good for ratings, but it would sure make our job as voters easier.

5. We want to believe.

Every con man selling a bogus investment scheme knows that his best tool for emptying your pocket is “hope”. As human beings, we need hope and we want it so badly that we will believe the unbelievable to have it. *“A risk-free 25% annual return on my investment?” “I hope it is true.” “I want it to be true.”*

The problem, however, is not “hope”, but misplaced hope. We should place our financial hope in savings and sound investments that grow gradually and steadily—not in a get rich quick scheme. There is a great parallel here to politics, government and the culture wars. Instead of being drawn into a get-rich-quick scheme, we are often sucked into a get-righteous-quick scheme. We want to believe that electing the right president will fix our political and social problems.

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Although most of know, intellectually, that one president cannot “fix” America, we frequently think and act differently. Perhaps there is a sub-conscious belief that electing the “right” president will somehow free us of our personal obligation to change the culture. Maybe we hope that the right person in the White House will save us from the necessity of using our time and money to disciple the nation.

Let me be clear that this “hope” problem is not unique to any single candidate. Just because “hope” was a theme for Barak Obama’s campaigns, does not mean that this problem is unique to a single candidate or a single party. This problem is equally true in both major political parties.

Much of the modern church has failed to provide Christians with a plan for social and political change. This is real hope. Using the investment example, we could say that the church does not have a gradual and steady plan for societal transformation. Without a gradual and steady plan, many concerned believers will desperately follow any con man who offers them hope—even unreasonable hope.

IPS exists to teach the principles of good government and to offer this gradual and steady plan for positive change. The complete outline of this strategy is beyond the scope of this article, but this is the real hope that our world needs.

Conclusion:

Yes the presidency matters, but not as much as you think. Real social and political change will not come from any presidential campaign. It can only come from changing hearts and minds. America (and the world) is in trouble because people with bad philosophy had a gradual and steady strategy for advancing their beliefs. For over a century, these groups of people have committed their time and money to relentlessly advance their cause.

We need a strategy and we need to make sure that we are not entertained or diverted away from our most important work by the side-show of presidential campaign theater.

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